



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

03 SEPTEMBER 2020 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Amelia Aboff	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Sam Dinning	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Rob Buchanan	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Rebecca Lyn Cooper (Planning & Zoning), Melissa Woods (Planning & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm and adjourned at 7:34pm

PUBLIC HEARING: 101-153 South Street, Boynton Yards Master Plan

Ms. Aboff recused herself from the discussion of this project.

John Fenton, Rola Idris, Robert Dickey, and John Sullivan from the DLJ & Leggat McCall applicant team were all present. Mr. Fenton introduced the team and gave a brief history of the project. There was discussion between the Board and applicant team about the existing conditions and the outline of application details.

Mr. Dickey gave a description of project parameters and discussed the current conditions.

Ms. Idris gave an introduction to site strategy and project details; discussed the urban design framework, buildings, civic spaces, and thoroughfares. She also discussed mobility and infrastructure aspects of the project.

Chair Capuano clarified that all project materials were available online and that anyone interested will be able to download and view them from the Reports and Decisions page of the City website.

Mr. Sullivan gave an intro into the design process, site survey, street grid, parcels, and residential/commercial use balance. He discussed the building orientation to the street network and civic spaces, parking and access (subsurface, grouping of vehicle access, bike network), and also addressed the massing and heights proposed. Mr. Sullivan also addressed the amount of open and active space provided, uses, and active edges, as well as transportation and infrastructure, permeability, and storm water retention aspects of the project.

Ms. Idris explained the applicant's sustainability goals, including neighborhood integration and wellness, carbon, water, energy, and resilience.

Mr. Fenton spoke about the numerous community responses and benefits.

Chair Capuano noted that achieving development in Boynton Yards has been a for the City for at minimum 30 years and welcomed the discussion on the project's next phases.

Chair Capuano raised the question of the ownership of small parcels of land south of South Street and Building 2 with Mr. Fenton to clarify the likelihood that the proposal's transportation and open space goals would be met. Chair Capuano also noted that the Board appreciated the team's inclusion of underground parking in the proposal, as local residents had indicated a preference for subsurface parking in Boynton Yards and Union Square.

Chair Capuano confirmed that the team was still anticipating a predominance of lab and research and development uses in the commercial space, and noted that the community was looking forward to progress in this area of the city.

The Chair opened the meeting for members of the Planning Board to pose questions of applicants or staff. No questions were raised at that time.

Chair Capuano opened the meeting for public comment, noting for all in attendance that this is a preliminary meeting and the Board doesn't intend to vote tonight.

Mariel Merchant (58 Austin St) asked why the decision was made to build the residential building last and noted concern about the housing shortage the City is facing. She also asked how much of the residential building will be dedicated to affordable units. She reported concern that the residential building won't be built until 2025, even though housing is sorely needed now.

René Mardones (337 Somerville Ave) spoke is a member of Union United, the Affordable Housing Organization Committee and the Jobs for Somerville Committee. He noted that, on the question of community benefits, most of what the team was providing was the minimum required by the zoning ordinance. He recalled that, in the negotiations for the Community Benefit Agreement with US2, US2 went beyond the minimum required by the zoning, and asked if there was any negotiation with the Union Square Neighborhood Council or other groups looking into community benefits that are beyond what is required by the zoning regulations.

Sarah Dunbar (79 Columbus Ave) wondered if the applicant team had studied entering the parking to Building 2 from the north side, so that future green space that could make use of the space that currently is shown as an entrance.

Wig Zamore (13 Highland Ave) noted that he appreciated the meetings and that the team had been great partners to the neighbors. He agreed that underground garages are a good solution and appreciates the choice to save land for buildings and green space. He also noted that he appreciates the use of MERV16 filtration for the building air systems. He reported some concern about the porosity of the site toward Union Square and the orientation of the streets toward Cambridge street, rather than an orientation across the tracks to Union Square. He suggested that in the longer term there may be multiple crossings

of the tracks possible and that option should be left open even if the current development team would not be providing the connections themselves. He went on to discuss other potential connections for the buildings and green spaces to connect to Union Square in the future.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston St) echoed Mr. Zamore's comment that DLJ has been good partners with the community, noting that Mr. Fenton and the rest of DLJ partnership had been willing to meet with any community member or group. She discussed her preference that Boynton Yards have a central Civic Space with no buildings on it, but noted that she appreciated the protected linear space. She suggested that the motor vehicle to bicycle parking ratio underestimated bicycle parking and overestimated motor vehicle parking. She also noted that she appreciated the team's commitment to using native plants and natural systems for storm water capture.

Phil McKenna (135 Willow St, Cambridge) thanked the Board for hosting and also for including nearby neighbors in Cambridge, noting that he lives in Cambridge, about 150 meters from Building 1. He is deeply concerned about the increase in traffic in nearby Cambridge and Somerville neighborhoods due to the proposed development. He supported Mr. Zamore's comments about other north/south connections, and noted that he welcomed the team's focus on pedestrians and bicyclists. He argued that the developers needed to go further in funding community benefits to reduce vehicular traffic congestion. He presented a petition signed by 16 members of the surrounding Cambridge and Somerville neighborhoods asking for the underpass at Earl Street that had been a part of the Union Square Neighborhood Plan and which could provide a vital connection between Boynton Yards and Union Square.

Seeing no other public comments, Chair Capuano closed the public comment portion of the hearing and extending the written commentary to Friday, September 11 at noon.

Chair Capuano reminded all present that the proposal is for a Master Plan Special Permit application, and that the Board would hear individual applications in the future for buildings, spaces and thoroughfares. He questioned the feasibility of a path underneath the train tracks to connect Boynton Yards and Union Square, noting the City would need to have control over adjacent land and have the cooperation of local stakeholders including the MBTA.

Ms. Woods confirmed that the Earl Street Underpass had been considered in the Union Square Neighborhood Plan, but that subsequent work had revealed that the Plan did not sufficiently account for infrastructure under the tracks and clearance necessary to accommodate that infrastructure. She noted that a vehicular connection under the tracks would be difficult, but pedestrian connections over the tracks represented a more feasible option to explore.

Member Buchanan noted appreciation for the discussion of a potential north/south connection and asked to what extent the project had explored creating a pedestrian connection over the tracks. He also inquired to what extent the applicant had explored potentially locating the parking entrance for Building 2 on either the west or north side of the building, noting that if South Street was straightened out as planned, it would result in the parking entry cutting into what would otherwise be open space.

Mr. Dickey responded that Building 2 was designed with a turn towards Union Square, and a relation to the Civic Space proposed in the initial phases, explaining that the intent was to activate all facades of the building, rather than have a clear front and back. He noted that the team was working to find a safe way to organize vehicle entry for both the current and future conditions and to provide an appropriate service

and loading area. He indicated that the team could address questions around Building 2 access in further presentations.

On the question of a pedestrian bridge, Mr. Dickey noted that the MBTA was not involved in the project and that it would be a difficult process to get a pedestrian bridge approved. He explained that such a bridge would require significant grade changes and that landowners on the north side would need to be willing and cooperative to provide landing areas.

Clerk Dinning noted that it was important for the Board to carefully consider concerns about residential and commercial balance, and asked staff to confirm his understanding that the residential/commercial balance in this area was set in the zoning ordinance.

Ms. Woods confirmed that there is a requirement to provide 75% commercial space in any Master Plan Special Permit application for Boynton Yards/

Clerk Dinning asked Ms. Woods to confirm that 25% is the most residential space that could be offered in this area?

Ms. Woods confirmed that he was correct.

Clerk Dinning thanked staff for clarifying and noted that to the extent that there are discussions about community benefits beyond the minimums required by the Ordinance, it would be helpful for the Board and public to understand what those are when any future presentations are made for this project.

Member Habib asked staff to clarify the discussion of issues surrounding views of Prospect Hill in the Staff Memo and requested additional details about retail space provided by the project.

Chair Capuano asked Staff to confirm dates for upcoming Planning Board meetings.

Ms. Cooper confirmed that the next regularly scheduled Planning Board meeting will be on September 17th. She also noted that a joint meeting of the Planning Board and Land Use Committee will be held on September 15th to take public testimony on proposed map changes and would not be a regular Planning Board meeting.

Chair Capuano noted again that written comment will be extended until September 11th at noon and can be submitted to planning@somervillema.gov.

Chair Capuano continued the hearing to September 17, 2020.

RESULT:

CONTINUED TO 9/17/20

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning & Zoning Division at planning@somervillema.gov.